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ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Written statement submitted by the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status (category II)*

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[10 August 1992]

1. Since the fall of communism, there has been a resurgence of the old demons of nationalism and anti-semitism on the European continent, and particularly in central and eastern Europe. The experience of communist rule for four decades after the Second World War merely froze rather than resolved

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* This is an abridged version of the paper given by Professor Robert Wistrich at a conference on "Anti-semitism in post-totalitarian Europe" held in Prague in the summer of 1992. Professor Wistrich, a world-renowned expert on anti-semitism, holds the Chair of Jewish Studies at London University and of European History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His recent book, Antisemitism, the Longest Hatred has recently been published in London and New York. A longer version of this statement was published by Commentary (New York) magazine in its August 1992 issue.

these underlying conflicts and tensions, including the anti-semitism which between the two world wars was an integral expression of the struggle for Polish, Romanian, Hungarian, or Slovak national identity. Once that iron grip came unfastened, many of the old wounds resurfaced, alongside and in opposition to aspirations for national independence based on traditions deriving from the western Enlightenment.

2. The "Jewish question" has definitely been revived in the wake of the collapse of the communist regimes, and has become inextricable from all the nagging issues of national identity - of what actually constitutes Polishness, Czechness, Hungarianness, etc. - that bedevil eastern European society. We are witnessing the gory results of that larger contention today in Yugoslavia, and perhaps tomorrow in the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania and the Balkans. Czechs and Slovaks may have united to overthrow communism but since then, and despite the close linguistic ties between them, militant separatism has revived in Slovakia (now on the verge of independence), and the Jews have been dragged into the picture.

3. In forging their national identity, Czechs can at least look back to a functioning interwar liberal democracy, which preceded the Nazi conquest and the later communist seizure of power. But Slovak nationalists, dreaming of sovereignty, look back with admiration to Monseigneur Josef Tiso, the leader of the only separate Slovak State in modern times, who collaborated with the Nazis and bore considerable responsibility for the genocide of Slovak Jews. Is it any wonder, then, that with Mgr. Tiso's rehabilitation, anti-semitic slogans have multiplied on the walls of Bratislava and other Slovak cities? Czechs, too, are hardly immune from such intolerance. In the Czech areas of Bohemia and Moravia, there has been a rise in xenophobic attacks on Gypsies and migrant foreign workers, and a mushrooming of skinhead and neo-Nazi gangs.

4. The situation is much worse in embattled Croatia, where the President, Mr. Franjo Tudjman, has proved to be a specialist in the rewriting of history. In a book published in 1989, Mr. Tudjman reduced the number of Jewish victims of the Holocaust to 1 million, and accused Jews of having "taken the initiative in preparing and provoking not only individual atrocities but also the mass slaughter of non-Jews, communists, partisans, and Serbs". According to Mr. Tudjman, Jews participated in liquidating Gypsies in the notorious Jasenovac camp, when in fact the truth is the exact opposite: thousands of Serbs and innocent Jews were brutally murdered there by the pro-Nazi Croatian Ustashe. In the same work appropriately entitled Wastelands of Historical Reality, Mr. Tudjman even labels Israel a "Judeo-Nazi" State. It is fortunate for the 2,000 Jews in today's Croatia that President Tudjman's popular support derives not from his anti-semitism but from a perfectly legitimate protest at Serbian domination, from the seizure of Croat territories and from the longstanding historical aspirations for Croatian independence.

5. As for Poland, Hungary and Romania, the elections of 1990 showed that in these countries popular anti-semitism is still a factor that can be exploited in public life.

6. In Romania, in particular, since the coup of December 1989 there has been a steady rise in both xenophobia and anti-semitism, despite the fact that only about 18,000 Jews remain in the country. The nationalist opposition newspaper Romania Mare, with a circulation of over half a million, regularly features anti-semitic articles. In April 1991, the editor claimed that too many Jews held key positions in Romania:

> "The heads of television and radio are all Jews, and in parliament it rains Jews by the bucket. It's not their fault - domination has been their style since the dawn of time - but can't they let us breath a little, instead of trampling on us as they have been doing since 1947?"

7. This charge has been echoed in a number of other newspapers which frequently blame the Jews for bringing communism to Romania. Some members of the Committee for National Salvation, including the former Prime Minister, Mr. Petre Roman, have also been attacked for being of Jewish origin. The problem was further aggravated in April 1991 by a silent tribute in the Romanian parliament to the memory of the country's anti-semitic wartime dictator, Marshal Ion Antonescu, favoured ally of Hitler.

8. The situation is even worse in Poland. According to recent surveys, in a country where there remain at most 10,000 Jews out of a population of nearly 40 million, over 30 per cent of the populace hold anti-semitic views. This has led to such grotesque absurdities as the 1990 whisper campaign against the then Prime Minister, M. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Catholic accused of being a "crypto-Jew". At the end of 1990, not surprisingly, there was a rash of swastika daubings on Jewish buildings in Warsaw and elsewhere, and slogans like "A Good Jew is a Dead Jew" appeared at the Umschlagplatz, the site from which in the summer of 1942 some 500,000 Warsaw Jews were shipped to the Treblinka death camp.

9. Poland is perhaps the most spectacular example showing that anti-semitism does not always require the presence of Jews in order to flourish. But it is not the only such example. Whether we are dealing with the desecration of Jewish cemeteries, mindless graffiti, pseudo-intellectual theories about a world Jewish conspiracy of "hidden" Jews in the Government, this type of anti-semitism can be detected all over central and eastern Europe today. It even surfaces as part of the "explanatory" mechanism behind the measures taken in some of these countries against Gypsies, who today bear the brunt of racial stereotyping and social harassment in eastern Europe. For who but the Jews, with their well-known world conspiracy, could be behind the influx of these "undesirable" people?

10. Something similar is happening in western and central Europe as well, where the fear of being "swamped" by unassimilable foreign cultures has given impetus to a resurgent radical Right. In France, Belgium, Germany and Austria this new Right links, and will continue to link, the imaginary "Jewish question" with the real problem of foreign immigration. For the hard-core racists of western Europe, anti-semitism is anyway a central pillar of their outlook, and they have no difficulty depicting the alleged threat to the white European race as part of a diabolical Jewish conspiracy against "Aryan" civilization.

11. Within Germany itself, since the winter of 1991 foreign workers have been attacked in ever-increasing numbers by jack-booted neo-Nazis and skinheads, and crowds have cheered on these thugs as they besiege the hostels sheltering immigrants. But behind the hostility toward foreigners there is also more than a palpable tinge of racism, as ultra-Right groups have campaigned on the slogan "Germany for the Germans". In the city-State of Bremen, at the end of September 1991, one such group, the Deutsche Volksunion, won 6.2 per cent of the vote, and it recently repeated this performance in Schleswig-Holstein. The radical right-wing Republikaner did even better in Baden-Würtemberg in April 1992, winning 11 per cent of the ballot.

12. In Austria, the radical Right has made even more spectacular gains than in Germany. In November 1991, Mr. Jörg Haider's Austrian Freedom Party won 23 per cent of the vote in Vienna on an anti-foreigner platform. Unlike Mr. Fraz Schonhüber in Germany, Mr. Halder is no Waffen-SS veteran but a charismatic 41-year-old who represents the new wave of yuppie-style proto-fascism in central Europe. Mr. Haider himself has praised the "orderly employment policy" of the Third Reich and has eulogized the Austrian soldiers who fell in the service of the German Wehrmacht. Though Jews are not usually targeted in his electoral politics, there is no doubt that his Freedom Party contains a hard core of unreconstructed anti-semites.

13. It would be a mistake to exaggerate the threat: what still remains of Jewish life has in many ways improved dramatically with the demise of communism, and others, especially the Gypsies, are hated more than the Jews. But it would be a bigger mistake to ignore the threat, if only because anti-semitism is nowadays more openly expressed and Jews therefore feel more insecure, especially in the territories of the former Soviet Union.

14. Today, popular anti-semitism all over Russia and east central Europe is no longer a government policy (masquering as propaganda against Israel, Zionism or Judaism), but a spontaneous, often unpredictable sentiment whose bottom line is that the Jews are to be blamed for everything that is going wrong. However negligible the Jewish proportion of the populace in central and eastern Europe today, it seems that life cannot go on without the Judaeus ex machina. If he did not exist, then anti-semites would have to invent him; and so they appear to be doing. The persistence of this plague remains a major challenge to all who care about the progress of democracy, human rights and religious pluralism in the contemporary world.